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MEDIA MATTERS

Whatever the particular challenges of life in different parts of the world, people everywhere need pluralistic and independent media. Since its creation, UNESCO has sought to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image in the interest of international solidarity, democracy, peace and development.

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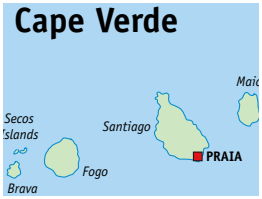

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THE POWER OF THE MEDIA

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Video training in Hebron, Palestinian Territories

Whatever the particular challenges of life in different parts of the world, people everywhere need pluralistic and independent media. Since its creation, UNESCO has sought to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image in the interest of international solidarity, democracy, peace and development.

The media can provide individuals and communities with information and ideas, with forums on which they can challenge and assess information; a resource that can help them gauge the efficiency of their politicians and help them exercise their democratic rights as voters.

The current edition of the UNESCO Courier looks at how UNESCO has been helping people around the world acquire the media that will meet their specific needs; learn about their problems and possible solutions; share experiences and opinions; and celebrate their culture.

This is why the Organization, through its Communication and Information Sector along with its International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), supports a wide range of media projects all over the world.

The Courier in this issue examines some of these projects, like the training Palestinian television reporter Lana Shaheen received to help her contend with the challenges of working in a context of political instability, material hardship and gender stereotyping.

Other programmes help geographically scattered communities, like those of the Caribbean islands, pool know-how and resources. While some training workshops, for example, assist journalists - in this instance in Mongolia - gain awareness of important issues of democratic governance. Meanwhile, in Cape Verde UNESCO has helped the authorities design the legislative framework that is indispensable for free and independent public and private media. ■

“Danger is part of the Palestinian journalist’s daily routine”

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Today was a busy day because the students attending the University in Nablus were voting for student president

Lana Shaheen, was one of the Palestinian ten female television reporters who received UNESCO-supported training at the Aljazeera Centre in Qatar. Since her return, she has had to adjust the principles and skills she learnt to the harsh reality of a tense conflict area.

The caller on the telephone informed me that Rafah crossing point - the only gateway for people in the Gaza Strip to the outside world - would be operating the following day. I was invited to come to Jordan by Al Ghad TV, to attend a preparatory course leading up to my new job as their Gaza Strip reporter. This was very good news – so why did I react with worry and fear, instead of pleasure and joy? The explanation can perhaps serve to illustrate the working conditions of Palestinian journalists.

Of course the idea of the new post was extremely encouraging. It meant more work experience to add to my CV and another source of income besides my main job with Palestine TV and other freelancing. But I was upset at the need to leave the Gaza Strip as a prerequisite. It wasn’t so much the difficulties and humiliation we face at the crossing. More significant was the possibility of getting stranded on the other side, waiting for weeks or even months for a reopening so I could return home.

I still remember a painful loss due to the irregular operation of Rafah crossing. I was eagerly looking forward to rejoining colleagues in Istanbul

A special training programme

Ten Palestinian women, all professional television reporters under the age of 27, from Gaza and the West Bank, traveled to Qatar in December 2005 for an intense two-week training at the Aljazeera Media Training and Development Centre. The programme included modules on technical subjects (such as programme editing), as well as broader questions, such as media ethics, the role of the journalist in society and what is news.

for the follow-up of a course on good governance and human rights, but I couldn't go because the crossing was closed. Freedom of movement – essential to a journalist's pursuit of a story – is a right not guaranteed to Palestinian media professionals.

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Hawara - check and commuting point south of Nablus, Palestinian Territories

The challenge of objectivity

It is not the only obstacle we face. Endeavoring to apply the valuable professional instruction I received in my UNESCO-sponsored training course at Al-Jazeera Centre, I sometimes feel frustrated. Practicing objectivity in reporting, for instance, may not be harmful to journalists in the west, but it can be fatal in underdeveloped countries ruled by undemocratic regimes if it is seen as threatening to dominant interests. As a Palestinian journalist, I have to stress balance and reconciliation in order not to upset this or that party, remembering that almost every party has its own militia, and every prominent official his own armed guards. Insisting on objectivity can lead to being fired from one's job, if not to detention, prison or death.

On another level, I also can't help noticing, when I'm doing a news report in the way I learned from my Al-Jazeera trainer, the big difference in quality between Al-Jazeera's editing units or transmission equipment and that of Palestine TV. Our limited financial resources make it hard to upgrade or replace equipment – and we don't have enough in the first place to cover the needs of news sections and programs production. The journalist has no choice but to make concessions on quality.

A dangerous profession

The fact that I am an eastern woman living in a Moslem community imposes extra restrictions. The Palestinian community still finds it improper for a woman to stay out late at night, though covering urgent news may require it. Modern casual clothes like jeans, so much easier for moving freely, can be considered as contravening religion, customs and traditions. Even within my family, I sometimes have difficulty in making my husband – an understanding, pragmatic partner, but an oriental Moslem man – accept that my work makes special demands. He is very sensitive to certain forms of conduct imposed by my job, like going out unexpectedly or traveling abroad.

Overall, danger is the most distinguishing characteristic of the Palestinian journalist's daily routine. In such a volatile flashpoint as the Gaza Strip, most reporting tasks, unfortunately, are risky. If a journalist is sufficiently bold and dedicated to cover the almost daily clashes - between different militias and armed groups, or attacks by Israeli occupation forces - he/she is certainly risking his/her life . To make the situation worse, no protection exists in the way of medical or social care for journalists who are injured. ■

Lana Shaheen in Gaza, Palestinian Territories

Investigative journalism in Mongolia

Enkhbaatar G. is a journalist with the Ardyn Erkh daily newspaper. In 2005, he participated in the "Media for Transparent Governance" programme. Its goal: to raise Mongolian journalists' awareness of corruption and train them in investigative journalism.

It was interesting. It was challenging. It was dangerous, too. Twenty journalists from popular Mongolian media investigated corruption issues for the first time and I felt lucky to be part of that intense eight-month programme. The team I was working with focused on three articles whose titles were: Suspicious Facts of Law School, True Face of Two Friends and Freedom to Journalists!

The training and supervision were provided by the Mongolian freedom of expression advocacy group Globe International in cooperation with Press Institute and the initiative was coordinated by UNESCO's office in Beijing.

We needed to find information, and information sources, facts, adequate proof and documentation. And we did not have any experiences.

Beginning the investigation

In January, we received basic training in investigative reporting. We formed four teams and we investigated corruption cases in the fields of health, economy, education and environment. I was in the Education team.

In April, Yvonne Chua from Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism came to evaluate our investigations and help us with the writing of our stories.

During the workshops we learned that corruption is more than bribery; that abuse of power comes in many shapes and forms.

After hours of discussion, my group agreed to focus on entrance and graduate exams at the Law School of the Mongolian National University, where we had a confidential source works.

With the help of a person who shall remain unnamed, we were able to access and copy the director's instructions over the past 10 years. It transpired that the Director, S. Narangerel, and his Deputy, N. Lundendorj, were the only people in charge of the State Examination Commission. Interestingly, we found that around ten present and former Members of the Parliament received degrees from the evening faculty of the Law School. Yet we found no trace of their enrollment at the school.

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Setting of IPDC's community radio project

Documents further showed that Mr. N. Lundendorj has got his bachelor degree and Ph.D from the evening faculty and gained Ph.D while he was working as deputy director.

We decided to look into the entrance exams to the Law School. One member of our team went there and as she was submitting documents for admission, a fellow applicant told her that he can buy the test of exams for 300,000 Mongolian togrogs (approximately US $258). He proposed that they share the amount.

A day before exams, our journalist and the applicant were given 42 questions out of the 50 questions of the entrance exam, enough to pass. Both took the exam and both were admitted. The questions were given to them by the sister of the applicant who had dinner with the director of the law school the day before the exam.

The guy had arranged for the questions to be bought demanded his payment. After long discussion, we decided to tell him the truth. He was shocked and asked not to publish his name.

The results

Journalists completed their articles in October and our material was published with the team names. It is sad to say that our team refused to publish one of the stories we investigated. Instead, we published one titled "Freedom to Journalists!"

The story we did not publish exposed serious corruption, but we couldn't publish it and this is very regrettable. Current legislation means that following somebody is persecution, collecting information is infringement of privacy and may violate legislation protection the secrets of organizations or the state. Taking pictures can be considered an encroachment on the subject's private life and recording their voices without consent is illegal. Criticizing someone is tantamount to defamation. And judges require notary verification before they will accept the documents we may produce as valid evidence. The law does not provide for freedom of information, nor does it recognize our rights to protect our sources.

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Mongolian University of Science and Technology

If investigative reporters must work the way detectives do, that is not possible in Mongolia. We did do it, but we ran the risk of being accused in violation of numerous provisions of the Criminal Law.

And we wouldn't stand much of a chance of winning in front of a court of law. Even if we enjoyed a fair trial, we would lose the case because there is no Mongolian law to protects us.

In the end, we learned how to look out for and detect corruption. But we have also learned to practice self-censorship. ■

Enkhbaatar G. in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Media Revolution in Cape Verde

Fourteen years after the birth of the country's first private radio station, Cape Verde is making notable progress in promoting press freedom. Measures have been taken to guarantee the public's access to pluralistic, quality information.

Cape Verde may soon boast six television channels. A fact hardly worth mentioning to a television viewer from the north, accustomed to choosing from a multitude of channels offering information, entertainment, culture, sport, etc., but in Cape Verde, it amounts to an upcoming revolution. As was at the time, just 14 years ago, the creation of Radio Nova, the first private radio station in the country.

Such major change in the media landscape can't be improvised. Regulations are needed to prevent rule by the strongest prevailing, and to guarantee the public quality and pluralism. Specific texts were therefore adopted, criteria established and procedure set in motion – a jury reviewed the six applications for Hertzian television licenses received by the Directorate for Social Communication (DGCS). The jury took into consideration, for instance, each project's range of coverage, as national coverage represents a significant asset for a country like Cape Verde, split into ten islands.

© UNESCO

A country split into ten islands

New regulations

Helping to set up regulations that are simultaneously fair, appropriate to the context and respectful of freedom of expression is part of UNESCO's work to promote free and pluralistic media. The Organization therefore contributed legal expertise based on other countries' experience. While there is nothing spectacular about the cooperation UNESCO established, it will contribute in the long term to developing a high-quality communication sector and the participation of citizens in managing public affairs.

Beginning in 2002, UNESCO helped found the Felix Monteiro Press Centre, an information facility for journalists within the Ildo Lobo Culture Palace providing periodicals, newspapers and books as well as on-line media. Through its International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), it then contributed to revising certain press laws and developing a new Social Communication code. Several decrees, recommendations and resolutions have already been published. They concern notably the creation of private media, the regulation of journalists' press cards (a press card commission started up in July 2006), the rules governing access and activity for television operators, the register of companies and social communication media, and most recently, the rules for the public competition for private television broadcasting.

Other projects

UNESCO also participated in the F_rum sobre Comunica__o Social, a social communication symposium held in Praia on 8 and 9 December, which brought together media professionals, representatives of civil society and officials in charge of public policy. On this occasion, Sara Lopes, the Prime Minister's Adjunct responsible for Qualification and Employment, mentioned other changes, announcing notably that the Cape Verdean government intended to concentrate on

modernizing the Ag_ncia Cabo-verdiana de Not_cias (Inforpress). The national press agency, currently suffering from serious underinvestment, has an important role to fulfill serving a population scattered among the different islands and a major diaspora.

At the DGCS, headed by Eugenio Martins, other projects are under way that may also involve UNESCO. They concern aspects such as training, providing equipment for young people to conduct reporting in the different islands, and creating digital archives of the country's television and radio.

The outlook for media in Cape Verde looks even brighter thanks to these measures. In 2006, the country was ranked 47th out of 167 countries on the list assessing press freedom published by the NGO Reporters Without Borders. ■

Inhabitants of the Caribbean on the same wavelength

From Haiti to Jamaica, an active network of local radio stations are able to share their experiences and pool resources across marine and linguistic divides on an internet portal.

It's a good idea whose time has been a long time a-coming...the idea that if Caribbean people could share the challenges and problems and solutions of their communities, 'live and direct' through a radio link, community empowerment and Caribbean identity could spread like a bushfire.

UNESCO's effort to support community broadcasting in developing countries started decades ago, but it is in the last ten years that the rapid development and penetration of the internet and associated technology has made collaboration and exchange not only possible but evident. In the last three years in the Caribbean the spread of internet usage, like cell phones, has not been just a phenomenon, it has also been a demonstration that poor and rich alike, the now generations, want access to technology that will allow them to play and to communicate.

The technology has raced ahead but the hard challenge to organizations, governmental and non-governmental, and to funding agencies, remains the same: how to make communication projects sustainable. In all instances, the challenge is about the sustainability of human as well as technological and economic resources.

© Sonia Mills

The Hamalali Garinagu Studio aims to preserve and promote the Garifuna language

Increasing Collaboration across the Caribbean

UNESCO/International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) has led the effort and sustained support for intensified collaboration and exchange between some pretty far-flung and

remote communities across the Caribbean region. Training has been delivered to radio stations in Guyana, Suriname, Jamaica, Dominica, Belize, Cuba, and Haiti in various aspects of Multi Media Centre operation and management. Given the community volunteer character of many of these organizations, some of the community multimedia centres (CMCs) cum radio stations have had mixed fortunes and will predictably continue to have their ups and downs.

Delivering training at the actual locations of community radio stations on a rotating basis has encouraged the sharing of ideas and networking among different radio stations and helped to grow the feeling of community and comradeship.

In October 2005, at a meeting in Suriname, the decision was taken to develop a regional network of CMCs. This decision set the stage for the final step towards the creation of the long-dreamed-of network. To help the process along, UNESCO has provided funding for the creation of an internet radio portal which will allow all interested CMCs to webcast through the Multimedia for Caribbean Communities (MCCLinks) website.

According to Alton Grizzle, the UNESCO Officer currently responsible for this development: "The creation of the Caribbean Internet Radio Portal will facilitate increased local content development and sharing, expand the reach of community media and provide a common space for self-expression and creativity."

In the first stage the three or four stations with greatest capacity will stream their broadcasts live. Until the other stations can do the same, they will provide content by e-mail or by regular mail to ROOTS FM, which is responsible for receiving and scheduling content. The Regional Radio Project (RRP) is working with several Caribbean community stations to strengthen their capacity to produce and deliver radio programmes. The technical management of the portal is provided by the Container Project, a quasi-CMC located in rural Jamaica which has also benefited from UNESCO/IPDC support.

Results that make a difference

Mervin Jarman, the founding manager of the Container Project gives an example of the sort of material that community radios can share: "We've got alot of taped programmes from Dominica – cameos about the effect of Hurricane Ivan particularly on the lives of young people – I found them totally riveting. There could be devastated young people right here in my community. Listening to them, I FELT them"

"I am very grateful to be a part of bringing this idea to fruition," says Rosamond Brown of ROOTS FM. "Yes, it's been a long time coming, and the one disappointing fact is that so many communities are still so remote that accessibility will remain a challenge." A challenge that he hopes to overcome with time.

The Caribbean Internet Radio Portal is a long-awaited opportunity for people across the Caribbean to hear the voices of their brothers and sisters telling their own stories and concerns and searching for answers together. ■

Sonia Mills in Kingston, Jamaica

© Flickr/Frank Nielsen

The Courier looks back

From our past issues, a selection of articles on media development:

Radio Ada, the voice of those without a voice, *November 2005*

A Ghanaian radio station begins to offer internet connection and training, thus opening new possibilities for its small community.

Community multimedia centres, *January 2004*

How this new initiative helps isolated communities in the developing world gain access to information and communication technologies.

SOS media, *October 2002*

Building independent and reliable journalism in post conflict areas is essential for reconciliation and reconstruction.

Nurturing Afghanistan's fledgling free press, *October 2002*

UNESCO helps the war-ravaged nation in the task of rebuilding its media.

Mexico's mercenary legacy, *July-August 2001*

The country's press has replaced old docility with hard-nosed opposition and helped to topple a 71-year-old system. Will it continue?

Rise of a new watchdog in Latin America, *July-August 2001*

A professor of journalism talks on how advanced technology helps the region's emboldened media in spreading democracy.

Small media, new voices, *February 2000*

A look at some of journalism's new voices from different regions of the world – and the deeper social impacts of this media explosion.

To learn more: www.unesco.org/courier

TIMELINE

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The first article of UNESCO's Constitution, adopted in 1946, calls for the advancement of mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples through all means of mass communication and urges the promotion of the free flow of ideas by word and image. This defines UNESCO's twin functions regarding the media: support freedom of expression as well as media development. Key dates since then:

1947 – The first survey of technical needs in the press, radio and films is completed. It covers twelve countries devastated by the Second World War.

1949 – A dozen countries set up the International Radio University through the joint sponsorship of UNESCO and the French Radio Broadcasting Service.

1949 – A weekly 15-minute review is broadcast in 18 languages by the radio stations of 47 countries and territories.

1957 – The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) is established at UNESCO's initiative.

1957 – The first regional centre for the training of journalism teachers opens at the University of Strasbourg (France) with the assistance of UNESCO and the French Government.

1972 – With technical assistance from UNESCO, Mali launches «Kibaru», its first rural newspaper in the Bambara language. More than a dozen African papers in several countries follow.

1977 – The Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development opens its doors in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). Initially a UNESCO/UN project, it engages in communication training programmes.

1980 – The International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) is created to help develop the media in developing countries.

1980 – An international commission on the study of communication issues, chaired by Sean MacBride of Ireland, publishes the report, "Many Voices, One World."

1983 – The UN proclaims World Communications Year to increase the scope and effectiveness of communications as a force for economic, social and cultural development.

1985 – The Kheda Project in India is the first recipient of the IPDC-UNESCO Rural Communication Prize. It creates audiovisual programmes drawing on traditional cultural expressions.

1989 – UNESCO adopts a "new communication strategy" replacing the New World Information Order launched by the MacBride report. It encourages the free flow of information at all levels while promoting improved dissemination of information and strengthening communication capacities in developing countries.

1990 - The new strategy takes effect with the organization in February of an unprecedented roundtable of media professionals from eastern, central and western Europe, as well North America, just three months after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

1991 – The Declaration of Windhoek on independent and pluralist media is adopted during the first of five regional seminars. During the next six years, similar initiatives are taken in Almaty (Kazakhstan), Santiago (Chile), Sana'a (Yemen) and Sofia (Bulgaria).

1992 – The International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) network is established with UNESCO's intellectual and financial backing. The network, based in Toronto (Canada), acts as a watchdog on issues pertaining to press freedom worldwide.

1993 – The UN General Assembly proclaims 3 May for the yearly observance of World Press Freedom Day.

1996 – The UN designates UNESCO as lead agency for assistance to independent media during the reconstruction period in the former Yugoslavia.

1997 – An independent international jury awards the first UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize to Chinese journalist Gao Yu.

2001 –UNESCO's first community multimedia centre is created in Kothmale (Sri Lanka). This new initiative combines local radio with a walk-in telecentre for internet and computer training in a rural environment.

2005 – At the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva and Tunis (2003 and 2005 respectively), UNESCO mobilizes the commitment of the international community for freedom of expression, multilingualism and respect for cultural diversity on the internet.

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